

Cultural tradition as a factor shaping the form of clothing

Doctoral thesis in the field of art,
in the discipline of fine arts and art conservation

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Abstract

The doctoral dissertation, titled *"Cultural Tradition as a Factor Shaping the Form of Clothing,"* takes the form of an empirical, artistic, and research-based essay, examining the relationship between cultural heritage and the process of shaping the form of clothing. The text is filled with descriptions, reflections, and observations addressing issues related to fashion and the way in which tradition, which is understood as a carrier of symbolic and historical values, can provide a creative impetus for contemporary clothing design, simultaneously serving as a tool for preserving and reinterpreting cultural heritage.

The written work consists of an introduction, two main parts, and a summary, supplemented by a bibliographic list. The theoretical section defines the concept of cultural tradition, emphasizing its complex nature and multidimensionality, and provides a definition of clothing and fashion. The subchapters analyze factors influencing the development of clothing in various areas and communities, ranging from geographical conditions, through rituals, beliefs, and ceremonies, to natural resources and crafts.

Particular attention was paid to clothing, viewed as a symbol and a medium of information, treated not only as a utilitarian object with a specific aesthetic, but also as a carrier of meaning, storytelling, and identity. In this approach, each piece of clothing becomes a record of the history of a given group or community, and simultaneously a form of intergenerational transmission, preserving traces of ancient cultural structures expressed in modern forms.

The main thematic thread concerns the traditional clothing of the Black H'mong tribe, the inhabitants of northern Vietnam. My fascination with learning about cultures on other continents inspired me to draw inspiration from this geographical area. A study and research trip to Asia, which took place in September 2022, allowed me to authentically experience the material and immaterial culture of the H'mong community and to delve into the secrets of local craft techniques.

Drawing on the Asian canon of clothing and textile production, I attempted to collect and present the richness of symbols, patterns, and colors present in traditional H'mong costumes. In this way, I sought to demonstrate how this community perpetuates its beliefs, history, and social structure through fabrics, embroidery, colors, textures, and compositions. This research also served as a starting point for an experimental creative process, in which traditional techniques, interpreted using modern technologies such as 3D printing, laser cutting, and computer embroidery, gain new quality and value.

In one chapter, I briefly characterized the work of several contemporary fashion designers, those for whom cultural tradition serves as inspiration for ideological, stylistic, and aesthetic explorations. By presenting selected collections, I aimed to highlight the diverse strategies for weaving traditional elements into modern design, thereby demonstrating the timelessness and universality of the cultural heritage that is invariably present in design practice. Observations and analyses support the thesis that contemporary fashion is increasingly becoming a cultural melting pot, and tradition is a catalyst for creative invention and innovation.

The theoretical considerations gathered in this author's essay on fashion in the context of culture and art constitute a unique form of dialogue between the past and the present. This is influenced by many factors that influence the shaping of clothing, including history, art, religion, and climate. It can be assumed that traditional clothing is not merely a relic of the past but remains a living carrier of identity. Each culture has its own evolutionary cycle in the development of clothing where traditional forms penetrate the present and are transformed and adapted using new aesthetic and technological realities. Clothing then becomes a significant link in the sphere of cultural exchange and the art of design.

The second part of the dissertation is filled with a description of the individual stages of the design and artistic process, which illustrate the materialization of the ideas. The starting point for creating this author's collection of women's clothing were the designs present in the traditions of the H'mong people.

Considering the adopted design assumptions in terms of form and function, the thesis included a pictorial analysis of tribal clothing, symbols used in the products, and inspiration boards. These provided the basis for mind maps, conceptual sketches, and preliminary designs. These were based on selected proposals, which were saved as final visualizations created in a graphics program. The repeatable elements, sizes, and variant compositional arrangements were developed in both monochrome and color versions. The documentation was expanded with photographs depicting material research and technological trials, and supplemented with construction elements, patterns, and detailed dimensioning.

The final chapter showcases an original clothing collection that attempts to combine traditional craftsmanship with a modern approach to fashion design. The resulting pieces combine cultural elements with innovative materials, creating a new artistic and applied quality while maintaining authenticity. The outdoor photoshoot with model Andżelika Karabin took place on the seaside beach in Unieście near Mielno in October 2024. The photographer was Izabela Bobrowicz.

The doctoral thesis also presents stylings based on selected clothing items from the aforementioned collection, analyzed for fast fashion applications and highlighting the practical potential of the proposed solutions.

This aesthetic and formal approach helps visualize the thesis that tradition is gaining a new dimension, serving not only as a source of inspiration but also as a tool for conscious design, embedded in slow design and the global discourse on cultural identity and fashion ethics. The studio photoshoot with model Oliwia Gudyno took place at the Aneta Nowacka Photography Studio in Bydgoszcz in January 2025. The photos were taken by Aneta Nowacka.

The summary includes conclusions drawn from the research and analytical process and documents the results of the artistic and design activities. These conclusions indicate that cultural tradition is a key factor shaping the form of clothing both in the past and present. Its influence manifests itself not only in form, function, and aesthetics, but also in the structure of meaning, methods of communication, and the cultural identity of both the creators and users of clothing. This dissertation can be an important contribution to the academic discussion on the place of tradition in the global world of fashion and the role of clothing as an informational, cultural, and artistic medium.